
Mood and Modality by F. R. Palmer

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F. R. Palmer, *Mood and modality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Pp. xii + 243.

Mood and modality are not exactly the most straightforward of subjects. In addition, this book is bound to be judged in the light of its predecessors in the Cambridge textbooks series, notably Comrie's two volumes on aspect (1976) and tense (1985), books which are by any standard a hard act to follow. I have reservations about parts of the book, but on the whole Palmer has acquitted himself well, and it is difficult to imagine anyone else doing a more competent job. The book goes well beyond his previous work on modality in English (e.g. Palmer, 1977, 1979, 1983), in terms both of the conceptual range of the material and the large number of languages discussed.

The book adopts a broad definition of modality as 'the grammaticalization of speakers' (subjective) attitudes and opinions' (16). Palmer acknowledges that there are phenomena that do not fit comfortably under this definition, notably the ability sense of *can* and uses of sentences like *You must go now* simply to report (rather than to impose) an obligation (16); but short of defining modality as 'anything that can be expressed using an English modal verb, or by any item in any language that belongs to a grammatical system some of whose members sometimes can be regarded as translation equivalents for English modal verbs', it is difficult to see how this problem could have been avoided. Except, of course, by not giving a definition at all, which is how Palmer deals with the notion of mood. Here again, it is hard to see a sensible alternative. Palmer notes that the term MOOD 'is traditionally restricted to a category expressed in verbal morphology' (21). He has previously pointed out, correctly, that in typological work it is meaning that counts: '...the identification [of a grammatical category – RMS] across languages ... rests upon shared semantic characteristics' (3). This means that a cross-linguistic category of mood, separate from modality, cannot be postulated unless a semantic characterization of mood can be given, distinct from the definition of modality cited above. Palmer is content to say that since there is 'some translational equivalence' (1) between the Latin subjunctive and English modal verbs, this justifies treating them in terms of the same cross-linguistic grammatical category. This is messy, but then the subject-matter is messy.

The broad definition of modality means that Palmer has to cover areas that go well beyond what most traditional treatments of English would take as modal. Under the heading of 'epistemic modality', for example, Palmer discusses not just the stock cases like *It may rain tomorrow* and *Paula must have finished by now*, which he calls 'judgments', but also what he takes to be the other main subclass under epistemic modality, namely 'evidentials' such as the quotative (used to indicate that the speaker only has second-hand

knowledge of what he or she says). In the same way, the category of 'deontic modality' is broadened to include imperatives, and 'volitives' with the verb *wish*. Charting a clear course through such a vast domain is a daunting task, and Palmer has to navigate carefully. The guiding principle is 'grammaticalization'. If a language has a grammatical system (a set of auxiliaries, say, or particle) which for the most part have modal uses, this is at least *prima facie* grounds for supposing that the other members of the system have some kind of link with modality in a wide sense. Hence, for example, Palmer includes 'evaluatives' such as the Ngiyaamba particles *mandanjul* 'good job' and *ga:mbada* 'bad job' under the heading of 'deontic modality', since 'evaluatives are sometimes included within, or semantically closely related to, modal systems' (119). He adds, though, that 'if evaluatives are defined as attitudes towards known facts, they are not strictly modal at all' (119). I don't see that this follows from his own definition of modality, and the claim is surprising given his view that 'there are good reasons for handling factual statements together with opinions and judgments. It can be argued that both are subjective, representing the speaker's point of view' (18).

For linguists working on modality, the book offers some interesting, if brief, discussions of previous work. Palmer is sympathetic to the view of Sweetser (1982) on the relationship between deontic and epistemic modality, although he refuses to go as far as admitting that (English) modal verbs are monosemantic (125). Some discussion of the similar proposals of Perkins (1982, 1983), surprisingly absent from the bibliography, would have been valuable here, if only to point readers towards alternative treatments of modality. He criticizes the distinction between 'hypothetical' and 'conditional' sentences set out in Dudman (1983).¹ He disparages as 'not very meaningful' (145) the assertive–non-assertive distinction proposed by Hooper (1975) and used by Klein (1975) to analyse the Spanish subjunctive – although his alternative suggestion that what counts is 'positive commitment' of the speaker towards the proposition is subject to the same criticism. I was less impressed, though, with the casual dismissal in five lines of Lightfoot's account of the history of English modals (Lightfoot, 1979) in favour of the 'gradual' approach of Plank (1984). I think these remarks should either have been left out, or (preferably) amplified into a wider discussion of diachronic change in modal systems.

My feelings about the volume as a textbook for students were mixed. The later chapters on complement clauses and oblique clauses cover such a wide range (including subject-raising predicates, purpose clauses and conditionals) from such a specialized viewpoint (the grammaticalization of modal notions) that I would hesitate to recommend them to students unless they already had

[1] The title of Dudman (1983) is as listed in the references below and not 'On interpreting conditionals' – the title of the adjacent paper by N. V. Smith – as incorrectly stated in Palmer's bibliography.

a thorough grounding in these areas. The first three chapters, however (Introduction, Epistemic modality, Deontic modality), cover a number of difficult issues in a clear way and could be useful in expanding students' horizons on modality, both conceptually and from a cross-linguistic/typological perspective. This is also true of the last chapter, which looks briefly at how modality interacts with tense, negation, person and opaque contexts. It is easy to say this, but I think the book would have been more useful, both for specialists and for students, if the two chapters on subordinate clauses had been reduced in size and the discussion in the last chapter expanded, in particular the discussion of opaque contexts. I think that students would also have benefited from discussion of two further issues. First, what is the status, from a cross-linguistic perspective, of the NICE properties (cf. Palmer, 1974; Huddleston, 1976) of English modals? Palmer describes these briefly as an example of grammaticalization, and points out that they are not found in French and German (33–36); he also suggests an explanation of them in discourse terms (90–1). But are they unique to English, or do similar phenomena occur in other languages? In either case, why?

The second issue has to do with the way modal notions are expressed in different languages. Some languages seem to use their modal categories more than others. Thus Truffaut (1963: 60 ff.) gives the following instances, among many others, where German uses a modal verb while a natural French equivalent does not.

Der Rechnungsprüfer muß jährlich einen Bericht vorlegen.

Das Gesetz will die Jugendkriminalität bekämpfen.

Er schrie so laut er konnte.

Er mag ein guter literarischer Übersetzer sein, aber dieser juristische Text ist zu schwer für ihn.

Er wollte ziemlich viel erledigen, er dürfte nicht vor 10 Uhr nach Hause kommen.

Neue Verträge sollen geschlossen werden.

Le commissaire aux comptes est tenu de faire annuellement un rapport.

La loi vise à réprimer le délinquance juvénile.

Il se mit à crier de toutes ses forces.

Il est certes un bon traducteur littéraire, mais ce texte juridique est trop difficile pour lui.

Il avait beaucoup de choses à régler, je ne crois pas qu'il rentre avant 10 heures.

Il est envisagé que de nouveaux contrats seront conclus.

Examples like these put modal expressions in a wider context, and also raise interesting questions about variation between languages.

This is not, then, a book to be recommended unreservedly. Specialists in the field, however, along with well-motivated students, will find much of value in it.

REVIEWS

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Brian D. Joseph and Irene Philippaki-Warbuton, *Modern Greek*. London, Sydney, Wolfeboro (New Hampshire): Croom Helm, 1987. Pp. viii + 281.

This volume is the latest addition to the Croom Helm Descriptive Grammar series (successor to the *Lingua* Descriptive Series of old) under the general editorship of Bernard Comrie and Norval Smith. The purpose of the series is to provide descriptions of a wide range of languages according to a highly detailed format devised by the editors and published as *Lingua*, 42, 1 (1977). This format is designed to be comprehensive but flexible, to promote work in universal grammar and language typology by facilitating cross-language comparisons through the fine-grained paragraph numbering system (e.g. 1.1.1.2.2.1.4, 'Constituents of Prepositional Phrases that can be questioned'), and to bridge the gap between theoretical and descriptive work, both by making reliable data available to theoreticians anxious to develop and test their theories against a broader database, and by showing descriptivists not only that there is an empirical basis to such speculation but also that they themselves can benefit from the broader perspectives which work of this kind opens up.

That there is a crying need for such a series in some format or another is